

Documents on Diplomacy: Resources

Biography: Arthur Vandenberg

Arthur Hendrick Vandenberg (March 22, 1884—April 18, 1951) was a Republican Senator from the U.S. state of Michigan who participated in the creation of the United Nations.

Vandenberg became a member of the United States Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1929. A modified internationalist, he voted in favor of United States membership on the World Court, but the situation in Europe moved him towards isolationism. Also his experiences during the Nye Committee hearings on the munitions industry, of which he was the Senate co-sponsor, convinced him that entry into World War I had been a disastrous error. He supported the isolationist Neutrality Acts of the 1930s but sponsored more severe bills which were designed to renounce all traditional neutral “rights” and restrict and prevent any action by the President that might cause the United States to be drawn into war. He was one of the most effective of the die-hard isolationists in the Senate. Except for advocating aid to Finland after the Soviet invasion of that country and urging a quid pro quo in the Far East to prevent a war with Japan over the Manchuria-China question, his position was consistently isolationist. In mid-1939, he introduced legislation nullifying the 1911 Treaty of Navigation and Commerce with Japan and urged that the administration to negotiate a new treaty with Japan recognizing the *status quo* with regard to Japan’s occupation of Chinese territory. Instead, Roosevelt and Secretary of State Cordell Hull used the resolution as a pretext for giving Japan the required six months’ notice of intent to cancel the treaty, thus beginning the policy of putting pressure on Japan that led to the Attack on Pearl Harbor.

During World War II, Vandenberg’s position on American foreign policy changed radically. Although he continued to vote with the conservative coalition against Roosevelt’s domestic proposals, Vandenberg gradually abandoned his isolationism to become an architect of a bipartisan foreign policy, which he defined as a consensus developed by consultation between the President, the State Department, and congressional leaders from both parties, especially those in the Senate. On January 10, 1945, he



delivered a celebrated “speech heard round the world” in the Senate Chamber, publicly announcing his conversion from “isolationism” to “internationalism.” In 1947, at the start of the Cold War, Vandenberg became chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. In that position, he cooperated with the Truman administration in forging bipartisan support for the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, and NATO, including presenting the critical Vandenberg resolution.

As chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, he asserted that “politics stops at the water’s edge,” and cooperated with the Truman administration in forging bipartisan support. Francis O. Wilcox, first chief of staff of the Foreign Relations Committee, recalls that Vandenberg’s Senate career stands as a monument to bipartisanship in American foreign policy. “[H]is legacy continues. Recently, the Senate bestowed a unique honor on the Michigan senator,” voting to add his portrait to a “very select collection” in the United States Senate Reception Room.

Excerpts from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_H._Vandenberg